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University to hold inaugural Undergraduate Religious Studies Conference

October 31, 2012

The Department of Literature and Philosophy and the Center for Religious Studies at Georgia Southern University presents its inaugural Undergraduate Religious Studies Conference on Nov. 2 and 3 in the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Information Technology, Rooms 1004 and 1005. The theme for this year's conference is "Religion in Politics: Beyond Left and Right," and will feature students' presentations of their research, a keynote address, "The Bible in American Politics," by Hemchand Gossai, Ph.D., director of the University's Religious Studies Program, and two faculty round-table discussions.

Students campus-wide were asked to submit papers addressing "a wide range of issues, including but not limited to: the interplay of religion, policy and politics; democracy and theocracy; one nation under God; the relationship between Christian and Muslims; sacred texts and public policy; social issues and religious mandate; current issues (e.g., contraception and the church); historical conflicts; church and state and religion and nationalism."

"I believe a conference such as this is important for two reasons," Gossai said. "First, given that this is an election year, it seems most appropriate that the issue of religion and politics should be talked about as it is very much a theme that is part of the political landscape. Many of the ideas that form part of the platform for deciding on the next president that who would be our representatives have religious – both evident and allusive – references.

"Second, it seems appropriate that, as a university, our students should be involved in a process that has enormous importance to them, and this conference provides an opportunity for attendees to engage in a conversation that I hope will expand the manner in which we think about this topic; I hope the conference will further widen the angle of what it means to be educated."

Thirteen student papers will be presented during the inaugural conference event, three of which were submitted from attendees of universities outside of Georgia Southern, including New Mexico State University, Connecticut College and Georgia Southwestern State University. The students' papers address topics such as religion's role in America's founding and contemporary issues, such as religion's role in the 2012 presidential election.

Registration for the free, two-day conference begins at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 2, and is followed by a faculty roundtable discussion and a screening of a filmed debate on religion and politics. Student presentations begin Saturday morning at 9:15, and the conference concludes with the second faculty roundtable discussion at 3:45 p.m.

For more information, visit class.GeorgiaSouthern.edu/litphi or contact Gossai at hgossai@georgiasouthern.edu.

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